



## Indiana Vacation '09: New thrills, more golf, lots of water

*Dragons, King Tut, water parks, quilt tours, balloon rides, African Journey all new in 2009*

As Midwestern families look for ways to stretch their vacation dollars, Indiana's showing them how to take those dollars into the jungle, down a waterfall, up and away, around the world and even back in time, all without leaving the Hoosier state. So, pack up the car, and hit the road.

### **What's new: Feed the giraffes, make a splash**

Our tour of Indiana begins in the jungle ... in Fort Wayne. The African Journey, opening this summer at the Fort Wayne Children's Zoo, invites you to feed the 16-foot-tall giraffes and go nose-to-nose with 1,000-pound lions.

Walk the winding paths and bridges surrounded by natural plantings, pools and grasses to encounter and learn about other African beasts, including hyenas, a first for the Fort Wayne Zoo. In the 10-acre grasslands, you'll meet zebras, ostriches and wildebeests.

The Zoo has renovated its African Village to provide a new interactive experience that allows kids to explore hidden tunnels in the rocks, try on a set of warthog tusks, watch an interactive video of animal research projects or try their hand at authentic African percussion instruments.

After a trip through the jungle, head to Santa Claus, Indiana, for a watering hole with world-class credentials: Holiday World & Splashin' Safari's brand new Pilgrims Plunge, the world's tallest water ride. Have a seat in a 10-person boat, which will rise more than 160 feet in an open-air elevator before plunging 13 stories at about 50 mph, while being splashed by walls of water all the way down.

Nearby, another wet and wild venue debuts: Big Splash Mountain indoor water park. The newly-opened Big Splash Adventure in French Lick features 40-foot slides for those who like to make a splash, or a lazy river for those who prefer calmer waters. Part of the Valley of the Springs Resort, Big Splash Mountain gives visitors 360-degree views of picturesque rolling hills and woods on 75 acres. The 154-room resort offers onsite dining and a 6,000-square-foot arcade, which includes an interactive play and learning center for kids ages one to five.

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### **Crazy for quilts**

After these walks on the wild side, take a simpler course in northern Indiana, which has pieced together a quilter's paradise. Elkhart County is expanding its Quilt Gardens after a booming inaugural year. This spring more than 80,000 flowers will bloom in 16 giant gardens planted to mirror old-fashioned quilt designs. Another 16 hand-painted murals will be on display throughout the heart of Northern Indiana's Amish Country.

On Aug. 8 and 9, dozens of painters from Indiana and throughout the Midwest will gather for the first-ever Quilt Gardens Tour Plein-Air Paint Out. The artists will spend the weekend capturing the beauty of the quilt gardens, giving visitors the chance to watch the artists at work in the gardens and purchase the artwork they create.

Always a part of life for the Amish, quilting takes on a festive tone this June in LaGrange County, which will debut a four-day quilt festival. Step into an Amish family's home to be part of a quilting bee, join a quilting class in a school house and visit a quilt shop hop, where you'll be able to collect quilt squares from shops throughout Shipshewana.

In Marshall County, they're taking quilting to a bigger scale, decorating the sides of rural and small-town buildings with hand-painted 8-foot-by-8-foot quilts. This first-ever Quilt Trail, along back roads and busy highways, will feature a variety of designs on the sides of barns, buildings and throughout downtown Plymouth.

### **First flights, giant dragons and kingly treasures**

As you travel south, watch the skies north of Indianapolis for the large balloon that tells you you're nearing Conner Prairie. The nationally recognized living history museum in Fishers takes flight on June 6 with the addition of tethered helium-filled balloon rides to commemorate John Wise's 1859 launch of the first manned balloon. Wise wanted to prove mail could be delivered across country by air, but winds took him instead 40 miles to Crawfordsville from Lafayette. Not the cross-country trip he intended, but the flight was considered a success, nonetheless.

Balloon Voyage will take visitors on a 15- to 20-minute tethered helium balloon ride to an elevation of 350 feet, giving passengers a bird's eye view of the entire Conner Prairie grounds and beyond. In the spirit of the balloon flight, Conner Prairie also is renovating the Clowes Common, where visitors can grab a snack at a concession stand resembling one from 1859. Outdoor interactive exhibits will give guests a chance to fill gas balloons and try on the helmets worn by balloon pilots and aeronauts.

When you get your head out of the clouds, head to downtown Indy to visit with dragons and pharaohs. The Dragons of Komodo exhibit opens at the Indianapolis Zoo Memorial Day weekend, giving visitors a chance to see the largest lizard in the world. The 10-foot-long dragons, known for using a unique hunting technique to capture prey many times their own weight, will be on loan from the Denver zoo through Labor Day.

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A short drive up the road takes you to the tombs of the kings and pharaohs. More than 130 treasures – including golden sandals, jewels and weaponry of King Tut and others – will be on display at The Children's Museum of Indianapolis from June through October. Also featured will be artifacts from some of Egypt's most powerful rulers, including, Khefren, whose great pyramid is the only remaining structure of the seven wonders of the ancient world; Hatshepsut, the queen who became king; and Psusennes I, whose magnificent golden death mask will be on display.

The exhibit includes four galleries, representing the four rooms of the nearly intact tomb where the treasures were discovered. Proceeds from the tour will go toward antiquities preservation and conservation efforts in Egypt, including the construction of a new grand museum in Cairo.

### **Eye candy, 200-hour reunion mark smaller towns**

Heading east to Richmond, you'll find a new bakery and bistro, where it's "almost too pretty to eat" is more than a cliché. Chef Ghyslain Maurais has opened a bistro in Richmond's Historic District, offering up his signature line of hand-painted chocolates, artisan pastries and authentic gelato along with a full menu of entrees. But the food's not the only thing grabbing attention – the chic décor also turns heads, bringing new life to a historic building where hardwood floors and brick walls all have been restored. Ghyslain's will be one of five destinations on the new Wayne County Chocolate Tour, which debuts in July.

Continuing the southward journey through the Hoosier state, stop in Madison along the Ohio River, and plan to join in the town's bicentennial party, which features a 200-hour reunion beginning June 6. Highlights include a film festival, boat parade and Historic Trades Fair. Throughout the year, special events will take place to celebrate the history of the town, which has 133 blocks and more than 2,000 structures of the country's most notable 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture, all listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Visitors can tour a number of historic structures, including a 19<sup>th</sup> century horse-and-buggy doctor's office, a Greek Revival style townhouse, Madison's first mansion, an 1816 Federal style home – believed to be Madison's first two-story tavern – the country's only restored 19<sup>th</sup> century saddletree factory, an 1865 railroad station and the Lanier Mansion and its formal garden.

### **In Lincoln's footsteps**

In honor of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth on Feb. 12, consider a journey to Southern Indiana, where young Abe lived with his pioneer family, and where you'll find a cluster of Lincoln-related sites.

The Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial in Lincoln City preserves the farm and home where Lincoln lived for 14 years. Featuring a memorial and museum, hiking trails and living history farm, the memorial is near the gravesite of Abe's mother, Nancy Hanks, in whose honor the 1,747-acre Lincoln State Park was originally created. Opening in June near the Park

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entrance is the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Plaza. Designed to honor the years Lincoln spent in Indiana, the circular plaza will be dotted with limestone pedestals signifying key moments in young Abe's life. A larger-than-life bust of Lincoln will hold center stage in the plaza designed by two Indiana artists.

After a short hiatus, drama returns to the park with the June 2009 premiere of "Lincoln," an original dramatic and multi-media presentation at the roofed outdoor amphitheatre in the park. Audiences will enjoy a play about the rough-and-tumble life of the Indiana boy who became the nation's 16<sup>th</sup> president. Ticket prices include pre-show activities for children and adults, a scrumptious meal, free popcorn and soft drinks at intermission, and an evening likely to provoke laughter, tears, conversation and contemplation.

### **Zippy thrills, 18-holes in the hills**

Switzerland County, also along the Ohio River, is introducing Dagaz Acres Zipline Adventures, where you'll soar high above the trees and experience the rugged wilderness from a bird's eye view. The course is a great way for families, individuals or groups to experience the outdoors.

If golf is your game, pack the clubs, and head to Orange County, where the much-anticipated Pete Dye Golf Course at French Lick opens in April. While the course's tricky terrain, rugged bunkers and narrow fairways likely will challenge any golfer, amateurs will appreciate the new hybrid grass. Cut to 1 inch, it will give the ball a little height and make it easier to hit. Still, the real highlight of the 18-hole course is likely to be the panoramic views atop the hillside behind the historic French Lick Springs Hotel.

A \$4.6 million restoration of the Donald Ross course is seeded with native grass emulating the Scottish links-style playing condition. Families will like the Valley Links Learning Center, where they can practice their game on the former Tom Bendelow course, which also has been redesigned. In all, the French Lick Resort will offer 45 holes of championship golf.

For another one-of-a-kind experience on the links, head up to Hamilton County's Crooked Stick Golf Club for the 2009 U.S. Senior Open July 27 through Aug. 2. A course also designed by Dye, Crooked Stick has a rich history of hosting championship golf.

### **Brown County: familiar territory, new amenities**

One of the Midwest's favorite getaways, Brown County is perhaps best known for its autumn grandeur, but the area offers plenty of reasons to visit any time of the year – and especially this year, when new attractions, lodging and merchants open their doors.

You'll find plenty of new shops hanging out their shingles in the quaint village of Nashville, and up the road, at the Abe Martin Lodge in Brown County State Park, you'll find a new 12,000-square-foot indoor aquatic center with water slides, water fall, a fountain, water sports area and a 10-person whirlpool.

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If you're looking for a quieter respite, visit The Cornerstone Inn, a Victorian-style bed and breakfast that's introducing cottages to its 40-acre site in Nashville, and the Seasons Lodge, which closed after a fire destroyed the cherished resort in 2007, will reopen in early 2009 after rebuilding.

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#### **If You Go**

For more Indiana travel ideas, check out [www.VisitIndiana.com](http://www.VisitIndiana.com). Discount packages, lodging and other trip tools can be found here. For those who prefer printed material, the new 2009 Indiana travel publications such as the annual travel guide, festival guide and golf & travel guide can be ordered at the website or by calling (800) 677-9800.

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